

Your Light—a Standard to All Nations

James E. Faust

Second Counselor in the First Presidency



I see the light shining in your faces. That light comes from the Lord, and as you radiate that light, it will bless you and many others.

We are honored this evening with the presence of President Gordon B. Hinckley, our beloved prophet, and President Thomas S. Monson, whom we also appreciate and love. We are privileged to be here with each of you young sisters and with your wonderful leaders.

You are young women of great promise. You have much to do in your lives. You will do great work in your homes, in the Church, and in the community. To do all of this, you need to develop a testimony and have faith in Christ, to focus on Christ rather than the world. You are righteous daughters of God, and He loves you and wants to help you.

The theme for this conference is so appropriate: “Arise and shine forth, that thy light may be a standard for the nations.”¹ I see the light shining in your faces. That light comes from the Lord, and as you radiate that light, it will bless you as well as many others.

This same light led the way for 15-year-old Mary Elizabeth Rollins and her 13-year-old sister, Caroline, on a dark and chilling day in Independence, Missouri. It was 1833, and an angry mob roared through the streets of Independence, burning property and wreaking havoc. In their path was the home of Brother William W. Phelps, where the printing press was kept. He had been printing revelations received by the Prophet Joseph Smith. The mob demolished the printing press and threw the wreckage into the street. However, they stacked up the printed pages in the yard so they could burn them later.

Mary Elizabeth and Caroline had been hiding by the fence, frightened spectators to all this destruction. Even though she was terrified, Mary Elizabeth’s eye was fixed on those precious pages. She and her sister ran out from their hiding place, gathered up the scriptures, and bolted. Some of the mob saw them and ordered them to stop. But the brave girls ran into a large cornfield, where they dropped breathlessly to the ground. They carefully laid the pages of revelations between the tall rows of corn and then covered the pages by lying on them. The relentless mobsters looked and looked for the girls, coming quite close at times, but never did find them. Eventually they gave up their search to see what further damage they could do to the town.

I believe the light of the Lord directed Mary Elizabeth and Caroline as to what to do and where to go for safety. Sisters, that light shines for you, and it will guide you as it did the Rollins girls. It will keep you safe even when danger lurks. As the Master promised, “I will also be your light ... ; and I will prepare the way before you, if it so be that ye shall keep my commandments; ... ye shall know that it is by me that ye are led.”²

My dear young friends, you can stand apart from evil, just as the Rollins sisters did, if you will develop your own testimony of the Savior. As you do so, you will grow in spiritual strength. Cherish spirituality, and you will learn how sweet it is.

You want to make your own decisions, but you ought to make those decisions with an eternal perspective. With age, experience, and faith, you will have the wisdom to make good decisions and also to make the right ones. I believe you young people know where to go to get the right answers. In the words of Mormon, “Ye know the light by which ye may judge, which light is the light of Christ.”³

A few years ago I stood on the spot where Joan of Arc was burned at the stake in 1431. Young Joan of Arc, one of the great heroines in history, became the unlikely standard-bearer for the French army in the Dark Ages, long before the gospel was restored. Joan had the Light of Christ and also the courage to follow its promptings and make a difference. Joan was a peasant girl who could neither read nor write, but she was bright. Long years of war with the English had impoverished and divided her country. At 17, sensing her life had a purpose, she left home, determined to help liberate her oppressed country. Naturally, people scoffed at her ideas and thought she was a little crazy, but in the end she persuaded them to let her have a horse and an escort to go and see the king.

Young King Charles VII of France had heard about Joan and decided to test her. He slipped into the ranks of the army and let one of his trusted associates occupy the throne. When Joan came into the room, she barely acknowledged the man on the throne, but promptly walked up to Charles and curtsied to him as her king. This so impressed the king that he gave her command over his 12,000 troops. At first the French soldiers did not want to obey her, but when they saw that all who followed her succeeded and all who disregarded her failed, they came to look upon her as their leader.

Clad in a suit of white armor and flying her own standard, Joan of Arc liberated the besieged city of Orleans in 1429 and defeated the English in four other battles. Twice she was wounded, but each time she recovered and went on fighting. Her orders seemed to be those of a military genius. She marched into the city of Reims and stood with sword and banner in hand while Charles was crowned king. She fought in the Battle of Paris until she was captured at Compiègne by English allies, who sold her to the English for 16,000 francs. She was imprisoned, tried as a heretic, and then burned at the stake in 1431.

Although this is a sad ending, it does not take away from Joan’s greatness. She was courageous enough to follow the personal inspiration to which all of us are entitled. As the Lord said to the Prophet Joseph Smith, “I am the true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world.”⁴

To other girls in the fifteenth century, Joan of Arc seemed to be very different. Sisters, don’t be afraid to be different in our century! Sometimes we have to be different in order to maintain Church standards. So I repeat, don’t be afraid to be different, but be as good as you can be. Many girls are concerned about their friends’ conduct and style of dress. Such conduct may be motivated by a desire to be accepted by the peer group. Joan of Arc did not worry about what her friends did, but rather about what she knew she should do.

In our society today I see so many people who blame others for their failures. I have observed that those who accept personal responsibility for their actions are more successful than those who blame their shortcomings and lack of accomplishments on someone else.

We can let the light within us show in many different ways. It may be as simple as a smile. I recently read the

account of a man in the northwest United States who used to drive past a bus stop on his way to work. He began to notice a young girl among some children waiting for the school bus. Even when it was raining, she would smile and wave as he drove by. He said: “The young girl was tall and slim and about 13 years old. She wore a mouthful of braces and I could see them glisten in the glare of my car lights.” Her effort to be friendly gave his day a good start and was something he looked forward to.

This man’s name was Hankins, and he had a daughter, Cheryl, who was about the same age as the girl at the bus stop. One day Cheryl asked her parents’ permission to attend an activity at a local church. A neighbor girl, Vicki, had invited her to attend. The activity was MIA, the forerunner to the Young Women program! Cheryl enjoyed MIA and after a while told her parents that Vicki was a Mormon. It wasn’t long before Cheryl came home from school and said that Vicki was sending two young men over—missionaries—to tell the family about her Church.

The elders arrived, taught them about the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith, and bore their testimonies of the Restoration of the gospel. As a family they began to read these new scriptures and were soon captivated by them. Mr. Hankins finally met Vicki. She was the smiling girl he had seen so many times at the bus stop. She was present when he and two other members of his family were baptized.

Looking back on Vicki’s actions and those of other young people, Brother and Sister Hankins became convinced that “the greatest potential for missionary work lies in the youth of the Church.” Brother and Sister Hankins have since served as missionaries themselves. They relied upon the referrals and good example that the youth supplied. Vicki—the girl at the bus stop who smiled every day, even when it was raining—changed their lives forever.⁵

Each one of you can be a friend to someone, even if it is only by smiling. Like Vicki, you can let the sunshine that is in your heart show in your face. The Apostle John wrote of “a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet.”⁶ Similarly, you young women can be bearers of light. In the Savior’s parable of the ten virgins,⁷ each young woman had a lamp. Clearly, this parable has both a temporal and a spiritual application. Oil can be purchased at the market. But another kind of oil, spiritual oil that is not for sale, can be accumulated only by our daily good works.

The parable tells what happened as all ten young women waited for the bridegroom. The bridegroom came at the darkest hour, when least expected. It was midnight, and the foolish five had run out of oil. You might wonder why the five wise virgins could not share their oil with the other five. It was not selfishness on their part. Spiritual preparedness cannot be shared in an instant because we each fill our lamps drop by drop in our daily living.

The late President Spencer W. Kimball defined those drops of oil for us a few years ago when he said:

“There are oils that keep the gospel burning brightly. One type of oil is the oil of family prayer. It illuminates us and makes us bright and cheery but is difficult to obtain at midnight. One drop or two will not keep the lamp burning long. ...

“Another type of oil is the oil of fasting. The last midnight is late to start disciplining our lives in preparation for the great day of the Lord. ...

“Another oil that is not available at midnight is the indispensable oil of home service. This rare oil of service is

accumulated through visits to the sick, through lending a helping hand. ...

“There is another oil that all will need—rich or poor, sick or well. Its light is brilliant and increases with use. The more that is used, the more that is left. It is easy to purchase in the day but not available at night. This is the tithing oil.

“There is one ... oil that is so precious that without adding it to the other oils no wick will burn. Without it, the light from all the others will dim and go out. This is the oil of chastity.”⁸

My dear young friends, many of you put oil into your lamps last year when you followed President Hinckley’s challenge to read the Book of Mormon. You can continue to do so every time you read the scriptures, partake of the sacrament, and offer your daily prayers. And as you each put oil into your lamps, your light will become “a standard for the nations.”

The counsel of the Lord to “arise and shine forth, that thy light may be a standard for the nations” should energize all of us. Great opportunities await you dear sisters to fulfill. Technology will continue to increase. The avenues for expressing your talents may exceed your fondest hopes and expectations. Challenges will come to each of you, but you can find happiness by doing all that you know to be right. You will need faith and determination to find your place in the world, but with perseverance and the help of the Lord, you can do it.

As daughters of our Heavenly Father, each of you can be a partaker of His divine nature.⁹ It is inherent in your beings. I testify that each of you young women has special gifts from our Heavenly Father. Some of these gifts are unique to womanhood. As you cultivate these gifts, you will grow in strength, purpose, and nobility.

This is the work of God. We are all His servants. He is watching over us. He wants us to succeed. We all have some part of the holy work to accomplish, even though it may seem small and obscure.

I hope and pray that the Lord’s choicest blessings will be with you wonderful young sisters to sustain and watch over you. I bless you that you may be strengthened and magnified and that happiness and fulfillment will come to you, and I pray for this in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

1. D&C 115:5.

2. 1 Ne. 17:13.

3. Moro. 7:18.

4. D&C 93:2.

5. See C. S. Hankins, “The Bus Stop,” *New Era*, Apr. 1991, 26.

6. Joseph Smith Translation, Rev. 12:1.

7. See Matt. 25:1–13.

8. In “Gospel’s Rare Oils Difficult to Obtain ‘at Midnight,’” *Church News*, May 13, 1995, 14.

9. See 2 Pet. 1:4.